

Paine College Announces Attorney Michael L. Thurmond, Loyal Alumnus and Chairman of the Board as Commencement Speaker

AUGUSTA, GA — Paine College proudly announces that distinguished alumnus, attorney, and public servant Michael L. Thurmond will serve as the Commencement Speaker for the College’s 2026 Commencement Ceremony, to be held on Saturday, May 9, 2026, at the HEAL Complex on campus. A respected leader known for his commitment to public service, economic development, and community empowerment, Thurmond earned a reputation as a “turnaround expert and fixer. The son of a sharecropper raised in Clarke County, Georgia, Thurmond graduated cum laude with a B.A. in Philosophy and Religion from Paine. He earned a Juris Doctor degree from the University of South Carolina School of Law. He also completed the Political Executives program at the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. His career spans decades of impactful leadership, including roles as Chief Executive Officer of DeKalb County, Georgia; Georgia’s Labor Commissioner; Director of the Division of Family and Children Services; and a member of the Georgia General Assembly.

As a proud Paine graduate, Thurmond embodies the institution’s legacy of producing leaders who are dedicated to service and excellence on the global stage. Known as someone who works to bridge racial and political divides, Thurmond announced his 2026 bid for Georgia Governor in August 2025.

His selection as commencement speaker underscores the College’s commitment to inspiring graduates through voices that reflect both achievement and purpose. “We are honored to welcome one of our own to Paine College for this momentous occasion,” said Dr. Lester A. McCorn, President of Paine College. “Michael L. Thurmond represents the very best of what a Paine education produces, principled leadership, unwavering resilience, and a deep commitment to uplifting communities. His life’s work is a powerful testament to the impact of service, and we are confident his words will inspire our graduates to lead with courage, integrity, and purpose.”

Known among the guardians of the Paine College Legacy, Thurmond’s commitment to his Alma Mater is both deeply personal and professionally

profound. As Chairman of the Board of Trustees, he has been a primary architect of the college's modern resilience. His leadership has been instrumental in navigating the institution through complex governance and accreditation challenges, ensuring that his alma mater remains a viable beacon for future generations. By leveraging his vast network and executive experience, he has provided the strategic stewardship necessary to stabilize the college's mission and physical presence in Augusta.

He is also an accomplished author and thought leader, widely recognized for his scholarship on race, history, and public policy. His work and leadership continue to influence conversations on equity, opportunity, and justice across the state and nation.

The 2026 Commencement Ceremony will begin at 9:00 a.m., celebrating the achievements of the graduating class as they prepare to embark on the next chapter of their journeys. The Commencement Weekend, scheduled for May 7–9, 2026, will include a series of events honoring graduates and welcoming alumni classes in reunion. For more information about Commencement and Reunion Weekend, visit www.paine.edu.